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OTHER FUNDS AND PROGRAMMES

United Nations Volunteers

Report of the Administrator

SUMMARY

This report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/200, of 17 December 1981, which directed that, beginning in 1983, a broad policy review be undertaken, on a biennial basis, of those funds and programmes that are managed by the Administrator and are under the guidance of the Governing Council. The report highlights major initiatives and activities undertaken by the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme during the biennium 1990-1991. The main text covers broad policy development and initiatives taken, in response to specific decisions adopted by the Governing Council on the UNV programme at the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth sessions. The annex provides statistical tables on UNV programme financial resources.

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I. PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS PROGRAMME

A. Major characteristics of the programme

1. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme has continued to enjoy growing support from Governments and partner United Nations agencies. UNV specialists and Domestic Development Service (DDS) field workers serving in the field rose from 1,801 at the end of 1989 to an estimated 2,080 at the end of 1991. The regional and sectoral distributions of UNV activity have changed little over the past two years: nearly three quarters of all UNV assignments have been in the least developed countries (LDCs) and in other land-locked and small-island States; about half of the assignments are in Africa, some 30 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, with the remainder distributed between the Arab States and Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The majority of UNV assignments were in agriculture, community development, health and education.

2. Notwithstanding the continuity in the sectoral distribution, there has been considerable diversification in the ways in which United Nations volunteers have been used over the past two years: there has been a greater sophistication in the technical roles, along with sharp growth in the DDS grass-roots activities. United Nations volunteers have taken on more training functions, as well as added supervisory responsibilities in agency-executed projects, and have given greater emphasis to national capacity-building. These changes reflect the growing recognition of the professionalism and quality of UNV specialists and DDS field workers by Governments and United Nations agencies, which are also borne out by the findings of project evaluations.

3. UNV-executed projects, which now account for about 55 per cent of all UNV assignments, are in fact managed by Governments or national organizations which set the direction and work-plans and give technical guidance at a senior level while UNV provides assistance through the recruitment of UNV specialists and other support.

4. An important feature of UNV work has been cooperation with the United Nations agency partners at the project level as associated agencies in UNV-executed projects where the United Nations agencies provide technical supervision, either through team leaders as in Angola and Namibia (World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)), or through consultancies.

5. For the past two years, the UNV roster has remained at about 5,500 candidates from 131 countries, but much more use has been made of networks of special-purpose institutions to undertake targeted recruitment activities. The proportion in the total of the seven largest supplier countries has dropped during the biennium from 43 to 34 per cent, while the previously steady fall in the percentage of industrialized country and other European UNV

specialists serving in the field has been reversed (now 16 per cent, up from 12 per cent). Efforts to increase the numbers of women and older volunteers have also started yielding results; the proportion of women in the field has increased from 17 to 19 per cent (from 312 to 385), while the proportion of volunteers over 55 has shown a modest rise from 4.2 to 5.2 per cent.

6. In Governing Council decision 88/38, where the Governing Council, inter alia, had called for improvements in UNV operation, most has been achieved in improving the design of multi-sectoral projects and UNV post descriptions, as well as periodic volunteer reports. Better post descriptions are already making it easier to match candidate profiles with the specific needs of the assignments. Several United Nations agencies, among them the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (the largest agency user of United Nations volunteers), brief a number of UNV specialists at their headquarters. More systematic briefing of newly arrived UNV specialists and field workers has been carried out at the field level.

B. New programme directions

7. An increasingly important role played by UNV during the past few years has been to assist national programmes of post-crisis rehabilitation and reconstruction, as with the ongoing programmes in Afghanistan, Angola and Mozambique; or to support capacity-building in the context of long-standing relief programmes, as in Ethiopia. A recent development has been UNV involvement in immediate, short-term responses to emergency situations. UNV has provided the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with volunteer specialists in transport and logistics, health, water supply and basic infrastructure. The first case was Liberia, where a team of UNV specialists helped UNDRO manage its field operation with partner agencies, followed by programmes led by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, where again the response had to be immediate.

8. Building on its DDS experience of over a dozen years in Asia and the Pacific, and Africa, in supporting participatory development with grass-roots organizations, UNV has started to expand its community-based initiatives in a number of areas with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations. The first has been to help local communities to cope with the socio-economic impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in several African countries: Zambia, Zaire, Malawi, and now Uganda, Congo and the Central African Republic, as well as in regional programmes for Africa, and for Asia and the Pacific. The second has been to draw up three pilot projects to support the work of low-income squatter communities in Fiji, Indonesia and Jamaica. A third has been to develop joint programmes where the combined and complementary contributions of regular United Nations agency international personnel, UNV specialists and DDS field workers can link the basic needs concerns of low-income communities, through municipality, district and

provincial institutions, to national levels: examples of such active UNV programme management roles have been in rural development in Lesotho, small-scale credit in Gambia, and a planned programme of support to women's initiatives in Pakistan.

C. Participating more actively in the programming process

9. In the last few years UNV has entered more explicitly into the international debate on appropriate volunteer roles in development (a programme advisory note has been issued on this subject) and on identifying where UNV specialists and DDS field workers might best fit within the spectrum of skills needed and available to developing countries for technical cooperation. Previously, it was more a matter of responding to requests to UNV, principally from Governments, through the offices of UNDP Resident Representatives. By also looking into roles that identify the comparative advantage for United Nations volunteers in specific thematic or sectoral areas, together with the programme's range of partners, a more informed development dialogue with host Governments and partner agencies becomes feasible.

10. Such efforts, spread over a wide range of consultations with partners, which include UNV annual consultative meetings, have encouraged the programme to play a more active role in the United Nations system's programming efforts, especially at the country and regional levels. Coinciding with programming preparations for the fifth cycle, UNV has participated in regional meetings and country programming missions, commented on advisory notes, listened in at least developed countries (LDC) round tables, and otherwise discussed overall programme strategies rather than just "inputs to projects". A list of countries with potential for major UNV involvement, based on expressed needs and prior experience, has formed the basis for the strategic planning of UNV programming missions. Consideration is also being given to the contribution UNV can make to the National Technical Cooperation Assessment Programmes (NaTCAPs) process, as in the case of Togo, where the Government accepted the UNV proposal to extend the first phase studies to include the contributions of volunteer specialists and grass-roots field workers in technical cooperation. UNV Programme Officers make a major difference to the programme's capacity to assist in programme development, in collaboration with other partners, at the level where it has the greatest practical impact.

11. UNV has had discussions with Governments and United Nations agencies at the working level, with the development banks, with other volunteer-sending agencies and with NGOs, on integrated programming involving the use of UNV specialists and DDS field workers. One example of the latter is a joint endeavour with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS)/Habitat and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to develop a common programme in support of low-income urban communities in slums and squatter settlements. Other cases of community-based programming, and emergency relief initiatives, have already been cited above. These efforts are part of a gradual process, and initial responses from Governments have been encouraging.

II. ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNING COUNCIL DECISIONS OF 1990 AND 1991

A. Enhancement of the role of UNV Programme Officers (Governing Council decisions 88/38 and 90/45)

12. In 1990 the Council increased the number of UNV Programme Officers in the field (who are themselves volunteers) from 40 to 60, funded out of the UNDP administrative budget. The scheme, now in operation for three years, has been a significant development for UNV. Together with their locally recruited UNV administrative assistants, the Programme Officers have given Governments and Resident Representatives much needed support in providing field contact for UNV specialists and help in resolving their work-related problems and in improving their living conditions.

13. Following training courses at UNV headquarters, the Programme Officers have also started to introduce distinct improvements in the briefing of volunteers and in the quality of post descriptions, project reports and field assessments essential for improved operations and for evaluation. Finally, their presence has raised the profile of UNV specialists as development agents in technical cooperation and allowed a wider range of government and NGO bodies and United Nations agency officials to become familiar with the UNV programme as an important instrument for development cooperation.

B. Exploring the potential for streamlining, rationalization and decentralization of UNV headquarters functions (Governing Council decision 91/45)

14. Since early 1989, UNV has been undertaking detailed reviews of the organization's various functions, processes and procedures. This has been done to rationalize the functions at UNV headquarters, and reorganizations have taken place to reflect these changes. Another objective has been to streamline and decentralize as many of the routine decision-making processes and as much of the administrative monitoring as possible to field offices (taking into account their capacities and workloads). Many procedural changes over the last three years leading to decentralization in administering housing, transport, leave and travel have been the outcome of internal reviews.

15. The Governing Council's decision to explore the potential for further rationalization and decentralization has given even greater impetus to this ongoing UNV work. Work has been completed on a computer program designed to support the routine functions of the Programme Officers in the field (UNV-POSS, or Programme Officer Support System), to whom an increasing number of tasks had already been delegated by UNV headquarters. Implementation of this field system started in early 1991.

16. In mid-1991 UNV embarked on the design of a comprehensive management information system covering every aspect of its areas of responsibility. A

priority objective of the system's design has been to identify processes, especially in the daily UNV headquarters-based tasks of recruitment, monitoring, administration and financial accounting that are amenable to simplification and automation. The first completed module of this system, which is due to be introduced in January 1992, covers UNV administrative and financial systems (both at headquarters and in the field).

17. While much of this development is targeted on improving the quality of the programme's management and support of volunteers in the field, it is also expected to yield productivity improvements. Once the new systems are fully operational, UNV intends to submit specific proposals for achieving economies in the administrative budget to the Governing Council at its fortieth session (1993).

III. POLICY ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

18. The use of UNV specialists and DDS field workers within the framework of United Nations system-supported development programmes remains below its potential. This may be due to the diverse nature of the programme's contribution and to lack of clarity in perception concerning its comparative advantages. However, the fact that most United Nations volunteers continue to be funded from UNDP resources means that the six areas of focus specified in Governing Council decision 90/34 are likely to influence the shape of the UNV programme. At the same time, the General Assembly mandates require UNV to serve the entire United Nations system, making it imperative for the programme to remain responsive to the needs of its clients among Governments and United Nations agencies.

19. Discussions over the past two years with Governments, the United Nations system and cooperating volunteer-sending agency partners suggest that there are two areas of greater emphasis for UNV to pursue more actively, as the section on "new programme developments" (paras. 7-8 above) already shows. These are: (a) support to community-based initiatives, in close collaboration with grass-roots organizations, and (b) emergency response and relief support activities, along with technical support to rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. UNV is strengthening its capacity to contribute on a larger scale in these areas.

A. Strengthening UNV capacity to support community-based initiatives

20. A number of cross-cutting issues influence UNV work at the community level: poverty alleviation - whether rural or urban - gender sensitivity, sustainable local resource management, and the impact of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which are closely related to behavioural patterns. It is particularly important, therefore, that UNV seek specialists and DDS field workers with the qualifications and experience needed to give the proper attention to these concerns, that the organizational and the programme frameworks developed

provide them with an adequate level of field support through briefing, access to appropriate technologies and non-personnel inputs, and that their impact, in terms of capacity-building at the community level, be closely monitored.

21. With a greater degree of concern for capacity-building and making optimum use of national talent, especially from among the communities themselves, UNV programmes would aim to encourage an optimal mix of international and local volunteers to bring about the necessary application of skills, ideas and experience. A team approach is suggested, which tries to overcome the earlier standard "counterpart" approach of technical cooperation. In making use of national volunteers in UNV-assisted programmes, the approach will need to be sufficiently flexible to suit the specific conditions of each country.

22. In all these aspects, UNV intends to build on experience with its Participatory Development Programme/DDS. Considerable progress has been made in the use of regional indicative planning figures (IPFs) for DDS activities, together with country IPFs and donor trust fund resources, but these sources of funding are far from adequate or stable. The UNV-DDS country specialists and field workers are increasingly used by the United Nations system and bilateral aid agencies as a form of "human resource infrastructure" for facilitating their grass-roots contributions. However, as available regional IPF resources for the fifth cycle have decreased to a point where they cannot continue to sustain even the current level of DDS activities into the future, let alone meet the growing demand from NGOs, the issue of secure funding (Governing Council decision 90/38) remains a serious concern. In addition, UNV should continue to seek additional support from other sources such as trust funds and special-purpose contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund (SVF).

B. Strengthening the UNV role in emergency response and relief support activities (Governing Council decisions 90/22 and 90/38)

23. The Council has recognized the effectiveness of UNV and its relevance in responding to emergency situations in the recent past. A growing number of crises have resulted in a demand for short-term relief workers. In the cases of Liberia and the Persian Gulf, UNV has sought to respond to the needs of the lead United Nations agencies. The main thrust of UNV has been to conduct special recruitment efforts on a virtually "drop-all-else" basis.

24. Problems arose in each case with the funding of the assignments, usually requested at short notice. Such situations can damage UNV credibility with the candidates and user agencies who themselves have made major efforts to respond to needs, often within a matter of days. In successful cases, UNV secured funding by its own efforts; its involvement at the earliest - and at least at the appeal stage - therefore, seems indispensable.

25. Volunteers in every country, as well as those working in a number of world-renowned bodies, have proved their commitment and worth in natural or

man-made disasters. It seems clear that UNV will also be called upon to give increasing attention to the area of emergency relief and rehabilitation. The UNV response to the Liberia and Persian Gulf needs brought this issue dramatically to the attention of UNDP management, yet UNV would be unable to cope with an increased volume of such requests without some reorganization so as to avoid disruption of its regular development operations.

26. It became clear that there was a need for the establishment of a mechanism within UNV to respond to requests in a swift and effective manner. Consequently, through a reallocation of existing resources, a small humanitarian relief unit has been set up to focus on special recruitment efforts, project and assignment planning, coordination with user agencies as well as donors, and to function as the in-house focal point whenever a new emergency arises. Special rosters, field support systems, terms and conditions of service, as well as in-house procedures are being developed by the unit. A few Governments are expected to supplement the unit with professional staff.

27. The unit could only be effective as a sustained endeavour, however, if it were provided with an emergency fund that could be replenished on a revolving basis. Such a fund would enable UNV to respond immediately to emergency needs. Possible sources of finance for the establishment of the fund include SVF, the United Nations agencies and international NGOs dealing with emergency relief, and bilateral donors. This assumes that UNV would provide part of the emergency relief personnel, either as teams or as individuals, which Governments and United Nations organizations require for their operations. Concrete proposals, however, would need to await the outcome of the discussions in the General Assembly on the United Nations system's activities for humanitarian assistance.

28. Furthermore, UNV also has a potentially significant role in disaster preparedness and mitigation, through support to Governments and to the offices of the Resident Coordinators. This could be financed from UNDP country IPFs, as well as from bilateral funding sources.

IV. STATUS OF THE SPECIAL VOLUNTARY FUND

29. Although a full report on the status of the SVF will be made available to the fortieth session of the Governing Council, there is one point that does require urgent guidance. Since 1988, 85 per cent of the total general contributions to the SVF (together with interest payments on the balance of prior years' contributions) have been used to pay for part of the external costs of UNV specialists and DDS field workers. This SVF support amounts to less than one third of the total external costs of volunteers, the rest coming from project budgets. However, the partial offset from project budgets and the general contributions (85 per cent) to SVF, are becoming insufficient to pay for the future external costs of a growing number of volunteers. Since contributions to the SVF have remained at a modest level, the accounts of the Fund have become increasingly insufficient to meet the remaining future

commitments (repatriation, return travel, etc.) to serving volunteers. The resource planning table in the annex provides a projected analysis of the status of the SVF.

30. Consequently, use of the SVF for this purpose is no longer tenable. It is proposed that, starting on 1 January 1992, the full external costs of United Nations volunteers (on a pro forma basis, with the SVF acting as an equalizing mechanism) will be charged to project budgets.

31. Based on paragraph 30, the funds available under the SVF could then be reserved in total for the purposes which were covered in the 1988 decision for the remaining 15 per cent of the SVF (which was not allocated to external costs). This would cover:

(a) Pilot and experimental projects covering grass-roots development initiatives, support to community, women's and youth groups, emergency relief and thematic areas such as HIV/AIDS, environment, urban informal sector activity, etc.;

(b) The briefing of United Nations volunteers and the training of DDS country specialists and field workers and government and NGO officials; and

(c) Special recruitment campaigns aimed at improving the universality and quality of candidates.

In view of the limited resources currently in the SVF, UNV will be able to support only a modest level of activities in the above areas. Increased funding of the SVF would, however, support a more active role by UNV in these areas. It would continue its regular reporting to the Governing Council on the use of SVF resources.

V. UNV INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING (IGM), 1-6 DECEMBER 1991

32. The third Intergovernmental Meeting is to take place in Kathmandu, Nepal (five years after the second IGM, held in Lesotho), coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of UNV. A number of papers prepared for the IGM consider UNV past, present and future activities, including those related to the special theme, "sustainable local resource management". The IGM will be immediately preceded by a technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC) workshop at which a group of NGOs from Africa and Asia will review areas for increasing the use of the TCDC modality in UNV participatory community-based activities. A short report from both meetings will be made available to the Governing Council as an addendum to this document, and as required by Governing Council decision 90/38.

ANNEX

UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS

RESOURCE PLANNING TABLE

PROJECTED RESOURCE AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION
OF THE SPECIAL VOLUNTARY FUND

(In millions of dollars)

		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1.	Availability of resources					
	Balance as at 1 January	6.77	7.13	6.97	7.36	7.90
	Voluntary contributions	0.82	0.90	1.00	1.10	1.20
	Interest and other income	0.66	0.70	0.80	0.90	1.00
	Partial offset of external costs (from Project Budget)	4.16	4.60	5.20	5.80	6.40
	Total available resources	12.41	13.33	13.97	15.16	16.50
2.	Utilization of resources					
	Expenditure	5.28	6.36	6.61	7.26	8.13
3.	Balance of resources as at 31 December (1-2)	7.13	6.97	7.36	7.90	8.37
4.	Commitment for future years as at 31 December a/					
	(a) In respect of serving volunteers	7.86	8.69	9.82	10.96	12.09
	(b) In respect of volunteers en route	2.28	2.28	2.28	2.28	2.28
5. (a)	Estimated deficit in respect of serving volunteers as at 31 December (3-4a)	(0.73)	(1.72)	(2.46)	(3.06)	(3.72)
(b)	Estimated deficit in respect of serving volunteers and volunteers en route as at 31 December (3-(4a+4b))	(3.01)	(4.00)	(4.74)	(5.34)	(6.00)

(Footnotes on following page)

(Footnotes to annex)

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a/ Includes commitments in respect of both serving volunteers charged to the SVF and volunteers en route at the year-end.

(1991 estimates = 2,080 serving volunteers plus 400 posts under recruitment)

(1992 estimates = 2,300 serving volunteers plus 400 posts under recruitment)

(1993 estimates = 2,600 serving volunteers plus 400 posts under recruitment)

(1994 estimates = 2,900 serving volunteers plus 400 posts under recruitment)

(1995 estimates = 3,200 serving volunteers plus 400 posts under recruitment)